

May 28, 2017
7 Easter
Christ Church, Mexia

On so many different levels, the stories we hear today are of the disciples living in transitional times. In reading from Acts they are trying to cope with the fact that Jesus has ascended to heaven, yet the promised Holy Spirit has not descended to them. They are living in a threshold - that space between one room and another. They've left one life behind, but they haven't arrived at the next. Having left one manner of life, they've not yet arrived at another. They are not one thing nor yet another. It is uncomfortable and indeed a bit scary, this state of living in the threshold. It is a never, never land filled with uncertainty and insecurity.

In His prayer of John 17, Jesus speaks of being in the world, but not of it. It's the same threshold experience of not being one kind of creature nor yet having developed into another. The disciples will suffer the repercussions of being people of the threshold, because the world does not like thresholds. They are too unpredictable (you never know what might pop out the other side.) They are unreliable to say the least (you just don't know for sure where you'll end up if you walk through to the other side.) It can be rather like Alice walking through the Looking Glass.

We are also often living in the threshold, as individual Christians and as a faith community. Perhaps the best metaphor for threshold life as an individual is puberty. I remember my nephew, Jeff going through a period of such rapid growth that he literally didn't always know where his body stopped and the

world began. I was amused to observe him one day walking back and forth in front of a mirror. He would stretch a long arm out and look first at his hand so far away and then at the mirror, with a look on his face that said "How did that get way over there? It wasn't that far away yesterday!" Not a boy anymore, he was also not quite a man.

All of us go through such times when it is apparent that we are in a threshold, but in a larger sense we are always there. Jesus described it as being in the world yet not of the world. It is hard to dispute that we live "in" the world - no matter how spiritual we become. Human beings might not live by bread alone, but we don't live long without it either. Add to "bread", the list of such staples as air, water, microwave ovens and internet access, and you can see without a doubt that we are indeed "earthlings". Our heads may occasionally be in the clouds, but our feet are steadfastly rooted in the ground.

At the same time, we are also "citizens of heaven" and not of the world. As such we stand out against the background of a fallen world. The minute we as

Christians begin to easily blend into our surroundings, we should begin to worry about the state of our faith.

In their book, "Resident Aliens," William Willimon and Stanley Hauerwas issued a strong summons for the Christian community to reclaim its distinctiveness as the Church of the Cross. They point out that as Jesus demonstrated, the world, for all of its beauty, is hostile to the truth. The cross is not to be a sign of the church's quiet, suffering submission to the powers-that-be, but rather the church's revolutionary participation in the victory of Christ over these powers.

Threshold life is not apt to be inside the comfort zone of many of us. Still, time and again we learn that the power of the Gospel is most keenly felt in the threshold.

There are two kinds of people in the world, "therefore" people and "however" people. The difference being that "therefore" people begin with a statement like "There are children going to bed hungry in our community. Therefore..." and then they proceed to devise a way to meet the need. "However" people begin with the same statement, "There are children going to bed hungry in our community. However..." and they then give all the reasons why nothing can be done.

Left alone by Jesus to walk through a threshold into a who-knew-what world, the disciples could have chosen either path. However or Therefore. They could quite reasonably have chosen the however route and explained why this was a good time to go back to Galilee, get back to fishing, and just let bygones be bygones. But by the grace of God, bless their sturdy hearts, they chose to walk through the threshold, claiming a "therefore" attitude. And "therefore" they stayed in Jerusalem during scary times and waited for the Source of all "Thereforeness" to send the Holy Spirit to guide them through.

The truth is God cannot do much with However nor with However people - people who simply choose not to walk through the thresholds that present themselves. Let me tell you that inevitably in any Christian community the time comes when we must decide whether or not we will walk through the threshold. I don't know what will be on the other side for us. I don't even know whether or not we will decide to join hands and walk through together. But I do know that we will come to an uncomfortable time at some point and we will find ourselves living in a place that feels neither here nor there - not one thing nor quite another. We will all recognize it because we will all have been in a similar space before, and we will have to decide what to do about it. Shall we grow and risk experiencing growing pains, or shall we remain comfortably where we are? Shall we be one kind of worshiping community or another, or perhaps more than one type? I can easily tell you that I am not comfortable in

these spaces either. I can easily say; However, I am too old for this, it's too hard for me, etc.

What the disciples found on the other side of the threshold was the power and the challenge and the joy of Pentecost. We will celebrate their arrival through the threshold next Sunday as we celebrate Pentecost.

The answer to the mystery of moving creatively through thresholds is to fall to our knees persevering in prayer, to maintain a therefore attitude in action, and wait expectantly for the power of the Holy Spirit to lead us through. Into the threshold the miracle of Pentecost comes. Shall we walk through?